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SUBJECT: THE SACHAR REPORT DOCUMENTS THE DISMAL STATE OF
INDIAN MUSLIMS

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Classified By: Political Counselor Ted Osius for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

1. (C) Summary: In 2005, the UPA government established the Sachar Commission with a mandate to prepare a report on the current status of Indian Muslims. The report was completed on November 17, 2006 and was made public early in December. It asserts that Indian Muslims are among the poorest communities in India and documented that they enjoy limited access to professions, government employment and upward mobility. It also stressed the fear and resentment that many Indian Muslims feel that makes it difficult for them to function outside of narrowly defined Muslim "ghettos" and a restricted number of trade and craft jobs. The report also highlighted that Muslim women in India are particularly fearful and that this prevents them from taking advantage of educational and employment opportunities. After painting this grim picture, the report made a series of general and specific suggestions that it said could alleviate the problems Indian Muslims face. Emphasizing that many of the problems Indian Muslims experience in life are common to poor Indians generally, the Sachar Report called on the GOI to take seriously its commitments to provide quality primary education to every child in the country. Other suggestions reflected the type of "social engineering" that has long been popular in Indian academic circles. Similar programs have long been in effect for Dalits, tribals, and other victims of discrimination, but have had little impact on their social

and economic development. For Muslims to experience genuine social advancement would require a widespread change of attitudes backed up by extensive daily interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. This is currently not happening in India, where Muslims are increasingly marginalized and retreating into Muslim enclaves where they have less and less to do with persons from other communities. Critics of the report characterized it as a transparent effort by Congress to win over Muslim voters on the eve of upcoming elections in Uttar Pradesh, which has a large Muslim population. It will be difficult for Congress to discredit this criticism, as it has tried similar tactics in the past. End Summary.

The PM's Directive

¶2. (U) On March 9, 2005 Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called for the formation of a committee to prepare a report on the social, economic, and educational status of the Muslim Community in India. It was tasked with determining exactly where India's Muslims lived, the nature of Muslim economic activity, Muslim assets and income levels, Muslim socio-economic development, their relative share in public and private sector employment, caste make-up, and whether Muslims have adequate access to education and health services. It started functioning on April 21, 2005, but failed to issue its report by the June 8, 2006 deadline, and the report did not come out until November 17, 2006. In its initial review of the report, the Prime Minister's Office commented that, "the community is relatively poor, more illiterate, has lower access to education, lower representation in public and private sector jobs and lower availability of bank credit for self-employment. In urban areas, the community mostly lives in slums characterized by

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poor municipal infrastructure."

¶3. (U) The Committee (called the Sachar Committee after its Chairman, retired high court judge Rajindar Sachar) determined that 13 of India's 28 states had large Muslim populations: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, West Bengal, Delhi, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar and Maharashtra. The Committee traveled extensively throughout these states speaking with government officials, NGOs, academics and a cross-section of the Muslim community. In addition, it systematically mined the GOI's compiled data on Muslims and their welfare. The report makes a number of generalizations regarding the state of Muslims in India that paints a dismal picture of their current status, alleges a lack of progress since independence and predicts further deterioration of Muslim living standards unless conclusive action is taken.

India's Largest Minority

¶4. (U) The size of India's Muslim community remains unclear, due to the paucity of systematic census data. The last census was conducted in 2001 and estimated the Muslim population at 138 million. The Sachar Report claims that the current consensus is that India's Muslim population stands at 150 million, making it the second largest in the world after Indonesia. Indians of all communities have been fond of stating that the Indian Muslim birth rate is much higher than the Indian norm, and that the absolute numbers of Indian Muslims is growing faster than India's population as whole. The report documents both of these assertions, stating that between 1961 and 2001 the Muslim population grew from 47 million to 138 million, an increase of 194 percent, while the general population increased 134 percent. The Report attributes this growth to a lower than average infant mortality rate (the second lowest of any community in India), but most significantly to a high birth rate (30.8 for Muslims - 25.9 for Indians generally). As a result, the Muslim

percentage of India's population increased from 10 percent to 13 percent between 1961 and 2001. However, birth rates are falling in all communities in India, although the Muslim birth rate is declining at a slower pace than other communities. Demographers predict that the Muslim population growth rate will stabilize to replacement level by 2030, when India's Muslim population will reach between 320 and 340 million. The majority of India's Muslims reside in four states. Uttar Pradesh accounts for 22 percent of all Muslims in India, while West Bengal, Bihar and Maharashtra have Muslim populations of over 10 million each.

Perception Meets Reality

15. (C) The Sachar Committee interacted with a variety of Muslims and recorded their perceptions of the state of the Muslim Community. The Report pointed out that any religious minority in any country is concerned with its identity, its security, and equity (equal access). The Committee concluded that Indian Muslims feel that they are faring badly in all

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three areas. According to the Report, Muslims see themselves as victims of negative stereotyping in India which makes it "daunting" for them to function in India's "cultural, social and public interactive spaces." Non-Indian Muslims look askance at Muslims, says the Report, and question their patriotism, while decrying "Muslim appeasement." As a result, Muslims complained that they are viewed with suspicion. The report also alleges that Indian Muslims face entrenched and systematic discrimination that relegates them largely to urban "ghettos" and prevents them from buying or renting a house in most areas or sending their children to good schools. The Sachar Report concluded that the Muslim enclaves have inadequate sanitation, electricity, schools, public health facilities, banking facilities and roads. Most Muslim interlocutors told the committee that they felt insecure, citing the failure of the GOI to arrest and convict the perpetrators of anti-Muslim riots and atrocities. Complaining that Indian media foster stereotypes of Muslims as violent and terrorist, Muslims pointed out that while the government often fails to provide basic infrastructure in Muslim neighborhoods, there is a heavy-handed police presence. The vast majority of Muslims blamed discrimination for Muslims' low levels of education, high unemployment, and pervasive and persistent poverty.

Women Bear the Brunt

16. (C) The Report concluded that Indian Muslim women bear the brunt of discrimination, as they are less mobile, less educated, and more tied to tradition, and more fearful of venturing out into the larger world. Muslim women are more likely to wear distinctive clothing that identifies them as Muslims than their male counterparts, and are constantly under scrutiny and control. Their fear causes many Muslim women to withdraw into "familiar orthodoxies" and dis`arage modernity. For many Muslim women, their world is the Muslim enclave of a city, and they seldom venture outside of it. Muslim girls have lower access to education than others. This is due to poverty as well as cultural practices. Muslim girls told the Committee that they wanted education, but were often ridiculed and threatened in public schools where they were in the minority. Muslim families, with no adequate public education available in their communities, must send their children to private schools. Those too poor to educate all the children, invariably pull the girls out of school. In addition, Muslim families are often compelled to put their girls to work to supplement the family income. Muslim women, largely confined to the home, are primarily self-employed, doing sewing, embroidery, stitching together garments or rolling beedis (home-made Indian cigarettes). This traps them into low income jobs, with poor work conditions and a lack of social security, health insurance or pensions.

Muslim Education is Substandard

17. (U) The Sachar Report concluded that government has neglected poor Muslim neighborhoods and failed to provide adequate education there. As a result, Muslims were compelled to establish their own schools, either secular

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schools for Muslim children, or Madrassas, with a heavy emphasis on Islam. Most Muslims stated that they viewed Madrassas not as a substitute for public education, but as a supplement, and an "important instrument" for maintaining the Muslim communal identity. The Report documented that only four percent of Muslim children attend madrassas and that government promises to assist in modernizing madrassas and their curricula have largely failed to materialize. Muslims also felt that the Urdu language, which is commonly identified with the Muslim community, has been systematically excluded from Indian life to the point of irrelevance. This has reduced Urdu medium education to a joke, with Urdu medium schools performing at the bottom in state-administered examinations. With few secondary or higher education institutions teaching in Urdu, many Urdu speakers were compelled to drop out of school after the primary level. In addition, Muslims complained that employers were loathe to hire an applicant with a college degree or high school diploma from an Urdu medium institution. Most Muslims were quick to point out that mastery of English was often the most important criterion for job selection in the private sector. Not interested in a Hindi medium education, they told the Committee that the government should either supplement Urdu medium education with intensive English or provide English medium schools to Muslim communities.

Denied Access to Jobs

18. (U) Muslims complained to the Committee that due to pervasive anti-Muslim prejudice they found it difficult or impossible to find good jobs, especially in the government and organized sector. The Committee found that even when Muslims applied for jobs that did not require higher education, they were denied employment. Much of India's Muslim community has traditionally been employed in crafts and trades, such as weaving and brass work, with most work performed by hand. As the economy develops, these traditional craft-oriented industries are being phased out, but the displaced Muslim workers, without modern skills or education, are largely unemployable in the new sectors of the economy. The Report documented that "a very small proportion of government/public sector employees are Muslim. (Although Muslims are 13 percent of the Indian population they make up only three percent of the Indian Administrative Service, 1.8 percent of the Indian Foreign Service, and four percent of the Indian Police Service. Muslims make up just 4.5 percent of the employees of the Indian Railways, with 98.7 percent of Muslims concentrated in the lowest ranks.) The Report concludes that low Muslim participation in Indian political life is partially responsible for these dismal figures. Saying that "Muslim participation in elected bodies is known to be small," the report points out that of the 543 Members of the Indian lower house of Parliament, only 36 are Muslim.

Findings and Recommendations

19. (U) The Report points out that many of the problems faced by Muslims in India are the same faced by poor people generally, and stem from poverty rather than discrimination

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or cultural factors. However, it asserts that "the Community

exhibits deficits and deprivation in practically all dimensions of development," with their situation most acute in West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Assam. It also concludes that "the perception among Muslims that they are discriminated against and excluded is widespread." With this in mind, the Committee emphasizes that the GOI adopt a policy of "inclusive development" and "mainstreaming" of the Muslim minority.

10. (U) The Committee recommended that the GOI:

--Establish a National Data Bank(NDB) to acquire store and disseminate relevant data concerning the status of religious minorities.

--Establish an autonomous Assessment and Monitoring Authority (AMA), charged with determining whether GOI programs aimed at religious minorities are actually being implemented.

--Establish an Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC), which would act as a sounding board where Muslims could go to file complaints of discrimination and gain redress.

--Develop a new "nomination procedure" for Muslims seeking public office, that would encourage interested Muslims to seek political office.

--Require GOI urban renewal programs to establish "shared spaces" where people of different religious communities could interact on a daily basis, while encouraging the break up of "religious ghettos."

--Develop and apply a "diversity index" that would document the amount of minority participation in educational institutions, workplaces, and housing complexes and provide increased GOI aid to those scoring high on the index.

--Implement regular training programs to "sensitize" GOI staff members who regularly deal with the Muslim public.

--Ensure that all future primary and secondary school textbooks "reflect diversity" and are "not derogatory with respect to specific communities."

--Provide free, high quality primary education to all children in India regardless of income.

--Build "study centers" to allow students from poor neighborhoods a place to study away from over-crowded homes.

--Map the country, identifying Urdu speaking areas, and ensure that Urdu medium schools are funded in those areas.

--Produce high-quality Urdu language textbooks for Urdu schools.

--Devise new admissions criteria for universities based on a points system that will provide extra points to students from low income groups.

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--Provide hostels (dormitories) for secondary school students (especially girls) who do not have a secondary school close to their home.

--Make diversity training mandatory for all teachers.

--Certify Madrassas, so that their diplomas have the same status as those from other schools.

--Ensure that public and private sector employees accept and recognize Madrassa certificates.

--Provide incentives to banks to open branches in Muslim areas.

--Ensure that Muslims are included on all job interview panels that interview Muslim applicants for employment.

--Devise a special "15 point development" program aimed at the 58 districts in India with a Muslim population of 25 percent or more.

--Mandate that public and private sector enterprises update their statistics on minority employment every three months and post the figures on websites for public scrutiny.

--Encourage enterprises which agree to undertake verifiable recruitment efforts in Muslim areas to adopt the label "Equal Employment Institutions."

Views of the Pundits

11.(SBU) The Report was viewed differently by those with different vested interests. The BJP was quick to condemn the Report as a cheap effort by the UPA to garner Muslim votes in upcoming crucial elections, especially in UP, with its large Muslim population. The BJP was also quick to dismiss the Report as yet another effort to introduce quotas (reservations) and special pay-outs for Muslims, and also pointed out that the Indian constitution does not allow quotas based on religious affiliation. In an article in the Indian Express, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, the president of the Center for Policy Research praised the report for its candor, saying "what is at stake, is not just uplifting this or that group, but the very idea of India itself: whether it has the capacity for transcending the cant, indifference and identity traps that have brought us to this pass." Professor Imtiaz Ahmad of JNU feared that by conferring "backwardness" on Muslims, it would open the door to political patronage (by Congress) to gain Muslim support at the polls. With Muslims sharply divided between a well-off elite and the poor masses, he emphasized, much of the largesse would end up in the pockets of already well-off Muslims.

12. (U) Asian Age columnist Seema Mustafa praised the report, for "shattering many of the myths about Muslims that have been fed and fostered by the malignant parivar (BJP and affiliates) over decades." Mustafa claimed that the report would "take the bottom" out of BJP propaganda that Muslims are "willfully backward and regressive." She also welcomed

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the report's documentation that the Muslim fertility rate is on the decline. Mustafa criticized the committee, however, for articulately describing the plight of Muslim women, without providing specific recommendations for redress. She also decried the Report's assertion that poverty is behind the low education rate of Muslim women, blaming it squarely on a "conservative mindset...that is reluctant to allow women out into the world." For Mustafa, Muslim insecurity lay at the heart of the report, as many Muslim's inability to compete in the mainstream was attributed to fear. Describing the report as "frightening" Mustafa emphasized that "any responsible and accountable government should be worried and overwhelmed by the knowledge that large sections of its people are living in sub-human conditions today."

Comment - India Resists Social Engineering

13. (C) The Sachar Report epitomizes well-meant social engineering. Incorporating ideas that are quite familiar to Americans, it recommends the creation of quotas, set-asides, and special programs and the creations of new layers of bureaucracy and the expenditure of large sums of money to address what is essentially a social problem. Social inequality is well-entrenched in all layers of Indian life. Muslims are only one of many groups that have been systematically marginalized for centuries. Since

independence, the GOI has intervened time and again to try to right social wrongs, but oppressive Indian social attitudes have proven largely resistant to the most well-intentioned programs and legislation. The GOI has also proven to be a poor delivery vehicle for these ambitious programs, with initial enthusiasm drifting into ennui and corruption siphoning away much of the funding. If they were properly implemented, (which is highly unlikely), the specific recommendations of the Sachar Report would go far to address Muslim grievances. They would not bring Muslims fully into the social mainstream, however. That would require a massive shift by Muslims and non-Muslims in how they view each other.

With the Report documenting greater self segregation and ghettoization by Muslims in India and lower levels of social interaction, it is difficult to see how this can come about.

¶14. (C) There is also the underlying political problem. Muslims are a large available vote bank, and it will be difficult for the UPA (and especially Congress) to refute accusations that the report is aimed at gaining Muslim sympathy and Muslim votes in time for the much-anticipated election in Uttar Pradesh, scheduled for early 2007. Muslims once voted en masse for Congress but have since drifted away.

Congress has been pondering for some time, how best to get them back, but has yet to devise a sure-fire formula. The Indian man on the street is weary of the political posturing and repeated unfulfilled promises and will be quick to dismiss this report as yet another political stunt.

15.(U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
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